Amended Abstract

Please replace the paragraph bridging lines 6 – 14 on page 16 with the following paragraph:

A perforated plate **[[(1)]]** for use in a wafer-handling chuck **[[(16)]]** has a pattern of through holes **[[(4)]]** by which a vacuum is applied to a membrane **[[(22)]]** to form suctions cups **[[(31)]]** that secure a wafer **[[(30)]]** to the chuck. Grooves **[[(5)]]** in a generally planar upper surface **[[(2)]]** of the plate interconnect the through holes. The grooves ensure the maintenance of the vacuum, and the consequent formation of the membrane suction cups, at each through hole, even when the grooved surface of the plate is in close face-to-face contact with another planar surface in the chuck. In one embodiment, the through holes in the perforated plate lie on concentric circles and the grooves interconnect radially-outward through holes to the next closest one or pair or radially-inward through holes.

[[Figures 1 & 3]]